

# A SAUNA & MUSCLE RECOVERY

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Photo Credit in der sauna image by

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The sauna is a 2,000-year-old invention that remains popular to this day. The Finnish sauna has long been known for its therapeutic health benefits. Whether you use it to relax muscles that have been through a grueling workout or to relax your mind after an afternoon of crunching your department's budget numbers, the sauna can help you in your recovery. This heated, wood-lined room provides health benefits that nearly anyone, including the athlete, can use to his advantage.

## Identification

The Finnish sauna consists of a log or wood paneled room, which contains a centrally located rock or rock-filled heating source. A room temperature of 70 to 100 degrees Celsius is maintained, and the humidity is kept quite low, at 10 to 20 percent. The protocol for sauna use involves spending a period of time in the heat, typically five to 15 minutes, which is followed immediately by cooling off with cold water. This procedure is repeated two to three times, for a total of 30 minutes.

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## Effects on the Cardiovascular System

The blood flow to the skin is increased and vasodilatation results from exposure to the heat cycle. A 2010 edition of the "Journal of Human Kinetics" reports that when you routinely take sauna baths, it leads to a decrease in systolic and diastolic blood pressure, and temporarily raises the heart rate during the heat exposure. These changes in endothelial reactivity, blood pressure and heart rate that occur during heating have a beneficial effect on the heart function. When you quickly cool down, this causes vasoconstriction, which effectively returns blood to the heart faster. The combined hot and cold treatment enhances your circulation and speeds up the repair process.

## **Pain Management**

Use of a sauna bath can result in the reduction of perceived pain. This is due to the increased level of circulating beta-endorphins produced in the body by sauna treatment. Beta-endorphins are known to have a pain-dulling, anesthesia-like effect. Acute muscle soreness may also be alleviated during sauna exposure. By eliminating the negative effects of pain and soreness, the sauna eliminates your down time.

## **Psychological Benefits**

The psychological benefits of heat therapy are perhaps what sauna baths are best known for, and for good reason. The sauna is a social gathering place where you can wind down. Sauna therapy helps you relax. It does this by regulating the autonomic functions, thereby creating a relaxing effect. Mental recovery is just as important as physical; a sauna achieves both.

## **Sauna Safety**

The sauna is safe. Repeated use causes minimal stress on heart function in healthy subjects. Actually, sauna use has been shown not only to be safe, but even beneficial for those who have experienced chronic heart failure. Sauna use is safe for all ages. Children in Finland typically begin sauna bathing at the age of 5 months, and they continue to take a sauna bath at least once per week throughout life.

## **Contraindications**

Avoid the use of diuretic substances before and after sauna treatment. If you have recently experienced a severe cardiac event, wait four to eight weeks before use. Do not use a sauna if you have a fever.

Read more: <http://www.livestrong.com/article/268288-a-sauna-muscle-recovery/#ixzz2CjtuduCu>